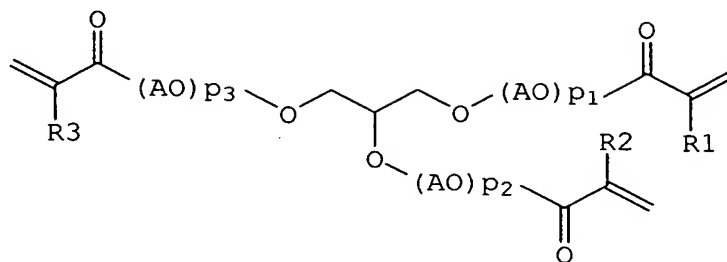


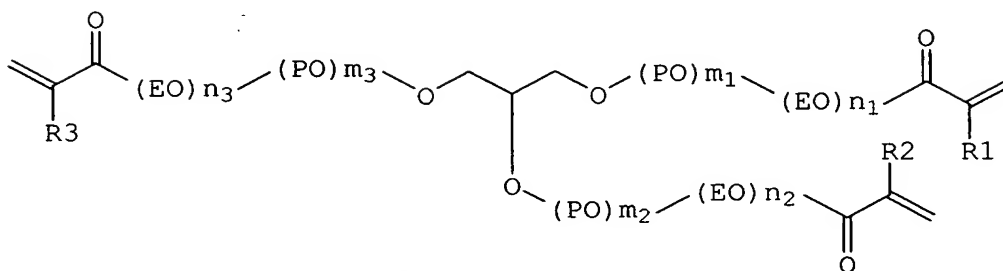
IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently amended) An ester F of ~~the~~ formula Ia



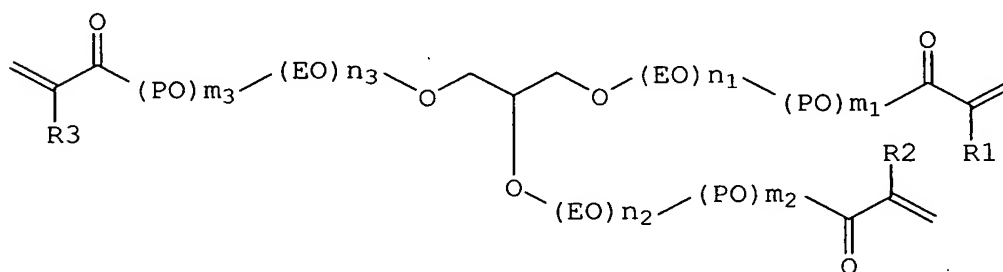
Ia

or formula Ib



Ib

or formula Ic



Ic

where wherein AO is for each AO independently
EO or PO,

where EO is O-CH₂-CH₂-,
PO is at each instance independently O-CH₂-
CH(CH₃)- or O-CH(CH₃)-CH₂-
m₁ + m₂ + m₃ + n₁ + n₂ + n₃ is 3, 4, or 5,
m₁ + m₂ + m₃ is 1, 2, 3, or 4,
p₁ + p₂ + p₃ is 3, 4, or 5, and
R₁, R₂, and R₃ are independently H or CH₃,
wherein at least one AO is PO and at least
one further AO is EO.

2. (Cancelled)

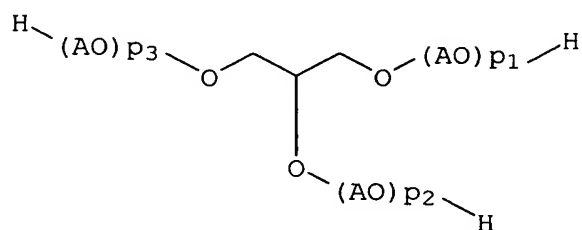
3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F as
~~per any of claims claim 1 to 3~~ wherein m₁ + m₂ + m₃ +
n₁ + n₂ + n₃ or p₁ + p₂ + p₃ is equal to 3 or 5.

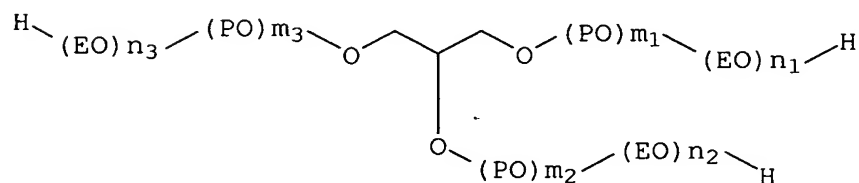
5. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F as
~~per any of claims claim 1 to 4~~ wherein 3 POs are pres-
ent in total.

6. (Currently amended) ~~An~~ The ester F as
~~per any of claims claim 1 to 5~~ wherein at least one PO
is present in each of the 3 alkoxy chains of glycerol.

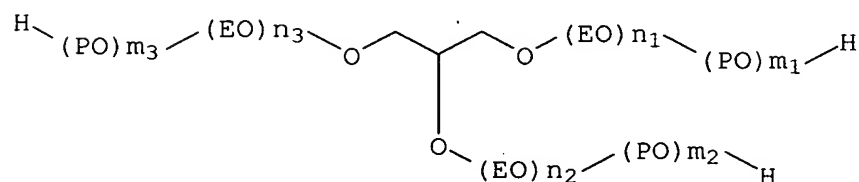
7. (Currently amended) A process for preparing an ester F ~~as per any of claims claim 1 to 6 of~~ from an alkoxyated glycerol of the formula IIa, IIb, or IIc



IIa



IIb



IIc

~~where~~ wherein AO, EO, PO, n1, n2, n3, m1, m2, m3, p1, p2, and p3 are each as defined in ~~any of claims~~ claim 1 to 6,

~~with~~ and (meth)acrylic acid, comprising the steps of

a) reacting the alkoxyated glycerol with the (meth)acrylic acid in the presence of at least one esterification catalyst C₁ ~~and of~~ at least one polymerization inhibitor D₁ and optionally ~~also of~~ a water-azeotroping solvent E to form ~~an~~ the ester F,

b) optionally removing from the reaction mixture some or all of the water formed in a), during and/or after a),

f) optionally neutralizing the reaction mixture,

h) when a solvent E ~~was~~ is used, optionally removing ~~this~~ the solvent E by distillation, and/or

i) stripping with a gas which is inert under the reaction conditions.

8. (Currently amended) A The process ~~as claimed in~~ of claim 7 wherein

~~the~~ a molar excess of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxyated glycerol is at least 3.15:1 and

the optionally neutralized (meth)acrylic acid present in the reaction mixture after the last process step substantially remains in the reaction mixture.

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently amended) A The process as ~~elaimed in any~~ of ~~elaims~~ claim 7 ~~to 9~~ wherein the (meth)acrylic acid is not more than 75% by weight removed from the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which reaction mixture contains the ester F.

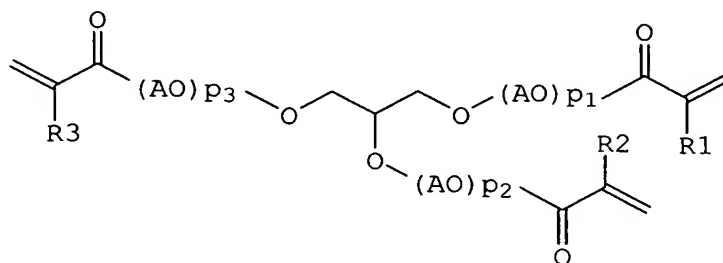
11. (Currently amended) A The process as ~~elaimed in any~~ of ~~elaims~~ claim 7 ~~to 10~~ wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which comprises the ester F, has a DIN EN 3682 acid number of at least 25 mg of KOH/g.

12. (Currently amended) A The process as ~~elaimed in any~~ of ~~elaims~~ claim 7 ~~to 11~~ wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which comprises the ester F, has a (meth)acrylic acid content of at least 0.5% by weight.

13. (Currently amended) A The process as ~~elaimed in any~~ of ~~elaims~~ claim 7 ~~to 12~~ wherein the molar ratio of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxyated glycerol in ~~reaction~~ step a) is at least 15:1.

14. (Currently amended) A process for preparing a crosslinked hydrogel, comprising the steps of

k) polymerizing an ester F ~~as per any of~~ claims claim 1 to 6, or an ester F of the formula Ia



Ia

~~where~~ wherein AO is for each AO independently EO or PO,

~~where~~ EO is O-CH₂-CH₂-,

PO is at each instance independently O-CH₂-CH(CH₃)- or O-CH(CH₃)-CH₂-

p₁ + p₂ + p₃ is 3, 4, or 5,

R₁, R₂, and R₃ are independently H or CH₃,

with (meth)acrylic acid, ~~with~~ optionally an additional monoethylenically unsaturated ~~compounds~~ compound N, and optionally ~~also at least one further~~ copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K and optionally of at least one grafting base L,

l) optionally postcrosslinking the reaction mixture obtained from k),

m) drying the reaction mixture obtained from k) or l), and

n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the reaction mixture obtained from k), l), or m).

15. (Currently amended) A The process ~~as~~
~~claimed in of~~ claim 14 wherein ~~for the ester F~~ AO is
EO.

16. (Currently amended) A The process for
preparing a crosslinked hydrogel, comprising steps a)
to i) ~~as per any of claims of claim 7 to 15~~ and addi-
tionally

k) polymerizing the reaction mixture from
one of stages a) to i) if performed, with an optionally
additional monoethylenically unsaturated ~~compounds~~ com-
pound N, and optionally ~~also~~ at least one further co-
polymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in the presence of
at least one free-radical initiator K and optionally ~~of~~
at least one grafting base L,

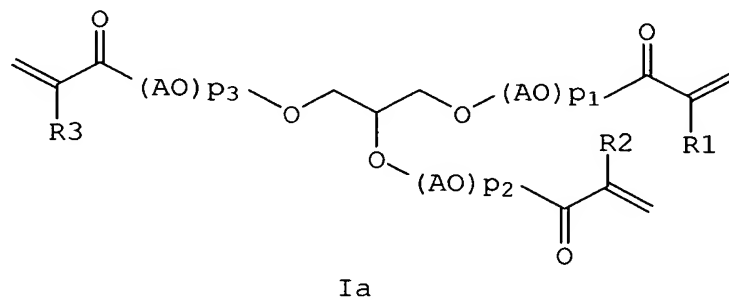
l) optionally postcrosslinking the reaction
mixture obtained from k),

m) drying the reaction mixture obtained
from k) or l), and

n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the
reaction mixture obtained from k), l), or m).

17. (Currently amended) ~~Polymer obtainable~~
A polymer prepared by a the process as per any of
~~claims claim 14 to 16.~~

18. (Currently amended) ~~Crosslinked A~~
crosslinked hydrogel ~~containing comprising~~ at least one
 hydrophilic monomer M in ~~copolymerized polymerized~~ form
 crosslinked with an ester F ~~as per any of claims of~~
claim 1 to 6 or an ester F of formula Ia



~~where~~ wherein AO is for each AO independently
 EO or PO,

~~where~~ EO is O-CH₂-CH₂-,

PO is at east instance independently O-CH₂-
 CH(CH₃)- or O-CH(CH₃)-CH₂-

p₁ + p₂ + p₃ is 3, 4, or 5,

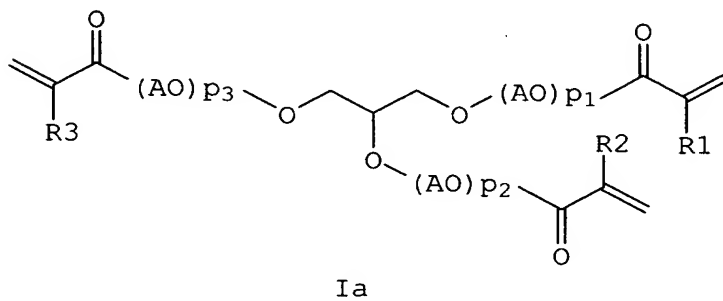
R₁, R₂, and R₃ are independently H or CH₃.

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Cancelled)

21. (Currently amended) A composition ~~of~~
~~matter~~ comprising

from 0.1% to 40% by weight of at least one
 ester F ~~as per any of claims of claim 1 to 6~~ or an
 ester F of formula Ia



~~where~~ wherein AO is for each AO independently
 EO or PO,

~~where~~ EO is O-CH₂-CH₂-

p₁ + p₂ + p₃ is 3, 4, or 5,

R₁, R₂, and R₃ are independently H or CH₃,
 and (meth)acrylic acid,

0.5-99.9% by weight of at least one hydro-
 philic monomer M,

0-10% by weight of at least one esterifica-
 tion catalyst C,

0-5% by weight of at least one polymerization
 inhibitor D, and

0-10% by weight of a solvent E,

with the proviso that the sum total is always
 100% by weight.

22. (Currently amended) A The composition
~~of matter as per of~~ claim 21, further comprising
 a diluent G ~~ad 100% by weight~~.

23. (Currently amended) Crosslinked A
crosslinked hydrogel ~~obtainable prepared~~ from a
composition of ~~matter as per~~ claim 21 ~~or 22~~ and
additionally

l) ~~optionally posterosslinking the reaction~~
~~mixture obtained,~~ postcrosslinked

m) ~~drying the reaction mixture obtained~~
~~directly or from l), and~~

n) ~~optionally grinding and/or sieving the~~
~~reaction mixture obtained directly or from l) or m).~~

24. (Cancelled)

25. (Currently amended) Crosslinked A
crosslinked hydrogel having a saponification index of
less than 10, ~~preferably less than 8, and especially~~
~~less than 5.~~

26. (Currently amended) Crosslinked A
crosslinked hydrogel ~~as per any of elaims claim~~ 17, ~~18,~~
~~19 or 23~~ having a saponification index of less than 11,
~~preferably less than 10, more preferably less than 8,~~
~~and especially less than 5.~~

27. (Currently amended) Crosslinked A
crosslinked hydrogel ~~as per any of elaims claim~~ 17, ~~18,~~
~~19, 23, 25 or 26~~ having a residual crosslinker content
of less than 10 ppm, ~~preferably less than 8 ppm, more~~
~~preferably less than 5 ppm.~~

28. (Cancelled)

29. (New) An article comprising a polymer prepared according to the method of claim 14.

30. (New) The article of claim 29 selected from the group consisting of a hygiene article, a packaging material, and a nonwoven.

31. (New) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 25 having a saponification index of less than 8.

32. (New) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 26 having a saponification index of less than 8.

33. (New) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 26 having a saponification index of less than 5.

34. (New) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 27 having a residual crosslinker content of less than 5 ppm.